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AUTHOR Barker, Narviar Cathcart
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ABSTRACT

For some black women, future careers are extremely important; for others, distinct alternatives take precedence. Relationships between the importance a black women places upon her career and her needs for personal and professional aspirations, marriage, and family were examined. All married (N=171) and single (N=92) black women enrolled in graduate programs at a university completed questionnaires. Self reports on the importance of having a career divided respondents into career and non-career women. Data indicate that career women expect significantly different lives from non-career women. Career women plan smaller families and see themselves as equal to their husbands in making family decisions; they are more apt to share roles and responsibilities with their spouses than non-career women. Non-career women indicate a willingness to compromise and be subservient to their spouses; career women demand equal recognition. Non-career women identify marriage and family as their most fulfilling goal; career women place a high premium on education and social recognition. Results may provide serious implications for future trends in marriage. (NRB)

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BLACK WOMEN: THEIR COMMITMENT TO MARRIAGE AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

BY

Dr. Narviar Cathcart Barker
Department of Social Work
Georgia State University
University Plaza
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

CG 014872

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BLACK WOMEN: THEIR COMMITMENT TO
MARRIAGE AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

There are as many differences found among black women as there are differences found among men. For some black women, future careers are extremely important; while for others, distinct alternatives take precedence. This study suggests that the importance a black woman places upon her career is directly related to her need for personal/professional aspirations and her need for marriage and the family.

METHOD

Questionnaires were administered to all 263 black women enrolled in graduate level programs at an urban, predominantly black university in Atlanta, Georgia, June 1978. One hundred and seventy-one of the women were married; ninety-two were single. Of the married women, 124 were in their first or second year of graduate study; the remaining 47 were graduating at the end of the academic term. Most of the single women, all of whom were first and second year graduate students, did not "foresee" any conflict between their marriage and family goals and their professional goals, while their married counterparts reported they had not "experienced" any conflict at the time of this study. Two categories were selected for purposes of this research: career women and noncareer women.

DATA

The women were asked, "In viewing all conceivable options available to you for your future, how important is having a career for yourself?" (See Table I). Those who checked "Of extreme importance" were classified as "career women"; the rest were identified as "noncareer women." Less than half of the black women in this study were career women.

RESULTS

Two hypotheses were tested: (1) Career women are more likely to experience conflict between the career goal and the marriage goal; and (2) Career women differ significantly from noncareer women in their expectations of husband and parenting roles.

The data in Table II indicates that career women are expecting to have significantly different lives from those of noncareer women. Career women are not planning large families: They report a maximum of two children per household. Perhaps they feel that serious careers and large families are not compatible. Career women also identify themselves as being equal to their husbands regarding decision making affecting the family. They do not accept the singular *"head-of-household"* phenomenon. Instead they acknowledge *"heads-of-household."* Furthermore, they are not reluctant to make a decision. Career women are less likely to respond "Go ask your father or guardian." Decisions are made quickly and without discussion. However, later, after reporting the decision to one's spouse or guardian, it may be modified or changed.

Clear distinctions or separation in roles and expectations between spouses are not always evident among career women. They are more apt to share roles and responsibilities with their spouse than noncareer women. Forty percent of the career women predicted conflict between marriage and career in comparison to twenty-seven percent for noncareer women. Of the forty percent career women who foresaw marriage-career conflict, they perceived an unwillingness in men to share equally in household chores and incidentals. There appears to be mounting resistment in career women who work comparably with their "9-5" spouses outside the home and must double-shift when they return home --- only to observe their spouse relax before the television or read the afternoon paper.

Furthermore, career women, unlike their counterpart, do not feel that their spouse's career should take priority over their own career choices. They project an equally strong commitment to professional identity and recognition. There is clearly an independence and thirst in career women that is not as prominent in noncareer women. Noncareer women place their emphasis within the home while career women are focused outside the home and on self. Noncareer women indicate a willingness to compromise and to be subservient to their male counterpart, while career women are less lenient and more demanding. Noncareer women exhibit fewer assertive skills than do career women and they seek lower-level positions in the labor market.

Noncareer women identify marriage and the family as their most

fulfilling goal. Their success is weighted upon meeting the needs and expectations of their spouses and families. This certainly differs from career women who see their success as having a career first and family second, or at least in combining career goals and family goals equally.

Although results were not measurable at the .05 level of significance, observable patterns in sexual behavior occurred between career women and noncareer women. Career women appeared more direct and assertive in their sexual advances than did noncareer women. They were highly verbal, physically active, and communicated more openly during lovemaking than did noncareer women. Noncareer women tended to be more traditional and subdued. They offered less guidance and originality during sexual activity. Lovemaking was reportedly initiated more often by the male and was dominated by him. Noncareer women, traditional in nature, acknowledged a feeling of uncomfortableness and fear in verbal expressions regarding sex. They remained silent in their thoughts and emotions. Their desire to satisfy their spouses superceded their own need for sexual fulfillment.

Career and noncareer women expressed the need and desire for sexual activity. Physical closeness and warmth, resulting from lovemaking, was extremely satisfying. Career women and noncareer women wanted to be loved and needed by members of the opposite sex. Finally, noncareer women tended to feel more self worth and feminine identity when they were sexually active. Career women, however, measured self

worth and identity by social success and career attainment.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

The results of this research provide serious implications for future trends in marriage. It appears that career women place a high premium on education and social recognition. They seem less willing to compromise and they demand equal recognition from their spouses. When children are involved the majority of career women seek an equal partnership in their development. Additionally, they exercise more control over pregnancy than noncareer women. This, indeed, has positive effects on a society that advocates birth control. However, for the spouse who wants a large family, beware!

Such occurrences can lead men to evaluate their personal needs prior to marriage and to choose openly between career verses noncareer women. Women will begin to seek men who not only share their ambitions and goals, but men who demonstrate the ability to support and to promote their careers...even when such behavior will increase social recognition and mobility for the woman. This role reversal creates for men the choice of husbands following their wives and their wives' career or remaining in their own career choices. Should such events occur, many divorces and discontented marriages may be eliminated. More importantly, women may tend to exercise their preferences for career and family prior to marriage so as to eliminate some of the anticipated friction in marriage. Contractual agreements between spouses prior to marriage will be inevitable. Falling in love may not be a criteria for marriage

for career women.

A final implication of this research leads to an assessment of whether career verses noncareer women is causing a separation and/or breakdown in the traditional concept of marriage and the family. Marriage and the family may be losing its effectiveness and security as more individuals move towards independence. The concept of marriage as a "partnership/arrangement" or a "convenience" may become a trend for career-oriented women soon to be realized.

These behaviors will certainly stimulate the need for couples' counseling. The importance that women are placing on individuality and social recognition poses a sincere threat to many of our men who are accustomed to male dominance. This reverse, or sharing, in roles has led to a critical breakdown in the American family. The effects are felt throughout society--and more specifically with our children. If relationships and roles between spouses are not clearly understood, children will receive mixed messages and under developed models. Such experiences can cripple the child's concept of self...leading to ambivalence and fear about adulthood and marriage. Conflictual marriages to a child are seen as "gray clouds, or punishment, that results from being bad."

Based upon the results of this research, the need for further study in this area is supported. Further studies should address race and cross-cultural groups of women, as well as men in order to ascertain their values and preferences for women.

TABLE I

RESPONSES OF BLACK WOMEN TO THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A PERSONAL CAREER

Response	N	%
Of extreme importance	124	47
Of minimal importance	96	36
Of no importance	2	1
Of equal importance	13	5
Of secondary importance	28	11
Total Responses	263	100%

TABLE II

AFFIRMATIVE PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCES IN EXPECTATIONS OF CAREER WOMEN AND NONCAREER WOMEN

Expectations	% of Career Women	% of Noncareer Women
Want two children or less	68	33
Want equal decision-making authority in issues affecting the family	60	50
Want husband to have equal responsibility and sharing of household maintenance	59	37
Foresee marriage-career conflict	40	27
Want spouse to have equal responsibility for child care	69	47
Want the availability of professional child care services	98	71
Feel husband's career should not take priority over wife's career	50	8
Want to work full time regardless of preschool age children	37	2

N = 131 for each group